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Larry E. Millburg Memoir

Millburg, Larry E.

Interview and memoir
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UIS Alumni Sage Society

Millburg, currently working at Ameren in St. Louis, discusses his experiences at Sangamon State University, earning an undergraduate accounting degree in 1981 after graduating from Lincoln Land Community College. Millburg describes his SSU professors Don Stanhope and Bob Maurath, as excellent educators who helped him complete the degree program and realize the dream of passing the CPA exam.

Interview by Mary Caroline Mitchell, 2010

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Narrator: Larry E. Millburg

Date: March 11, 2010

Place: Ameren, St. Louis, Missouri

Interviewer: Mary Caroline Mitchell

Q. Ok, today is March the 10th ... 11th and I am interviewing Larry Millburg in his office at Ameren in St. Louis and this is Mary Caroline Mitchell. And Larry, what is your position here? I have forgotten.

A. I am a managing supervisor of performance management and that entails looking over our incentive comp program and doing balance scorecards and measurements of performance for Ameren.

Q. Ok. And when did you get your degree at Sangamon State?

A. I finished my degree at Sangamon State in 1981.

Q. 1981, ok so you're within the first decade.

A. Yes, I was.

Q. So prior to coming to Sangamon State, what schooling did you have?

A. I was a graduate of Lincoln Land Community College. In those days we didn't have a four year school that was close, so you did your undergrad, your transfer degree basically at Lincoln Land Community College and then you went over to Sangamon State and finished it up. And back then and I imagine today they work together too, but they worked very close back then because they wanted to make sure all your classes you took at Lincoln Land transferred over to Sangamon State and you could get your four year degree.

Q. So what did you study at Lincoln Land?

A. At Lincoln Land I took your basic elective courses and then I took your beginning accounting courses, so some of your very, very basic accounting courses I took over at Lincoln Land. I got all my English out of the... practically all of my English out of the way, all of my math out of the way, history, geography, those types of things.

Q. Ok. And so when you enrolled at Sangamon State, did you have say declare a major or can you remember that?

A. I don't really remember if I declared a major or if I had to, but I did.

Q. Ok.

A. Because back then also I remember why I even picked Sangamon State because I could have went to Western or Eastern or Illinois State. But with Sangamon State, they were very highly rated with the CPA exam, still are today I'm sure. But I knew that my eventual career was going to be as a CPA.

Q. You felt directed unlike people sometimes these days.

A. Yeah.

Q. Just knew exactly what you always wanted to be when you grew up.

A. I knew what I wanted to be and you know I was one of those individuals that back then I got married at a young age so I didn't go off to school also. And so I went to school at night and it worked out very well for me with what the type of school Sangamon State was at that time, which was primarily a night-time school.

Q. Were you then living in the Springfield area?

A. I lived in Chatham, Illinois, so I had finished my education at Lincoln Land and I didn't get married until I was in Sangamon State. But I got married and then it just worked out well that... and then also I had a job with Central Illinois Public Service Company. So I've actually, I'm with Ameren now but I was prior to this with CIPS Central Illinois Public Service Company. And I kept my years of service so I had, coming into Ameren I have 32 years of service with the same company, which is nice.

Q. Yeah, particularly now.

A. Yeah, and I had a feeling you would say that.

Q. So were you working full time and then going to school at night?

A. Yes, I was. I had a full time job with CIPS and I was doing accounts payable work for them at that time and then going to school at night for accounting.

Q. Were they encouraging you to complete your degree?

A. Oh, most definitely. And to this day Ameren pays towards degrees but even then it was probably a little more generous. I probably only paid myself about 10% of my college education. If you made a B or better, CIPS would pay 90% of your education.

Q. How many courses did you carry at a time?

A. I usually carried if I remember right I carried two courses every semester.

Q. Oh, that's heavy.

A. Yeah, it was basically four nights a week. A lot of times, three nights a week most times because the classes usually met like Monday, Wednesday, or Thursday or...

Q. Tuesday Thursday, uh-huh.

A. Tuesday Thursday, yeah. And then once in a while I'd get one on a Saturday or Sunday to make it up. But I actually went from 19... it took me about four years.

Q. So when did you actually start at Sangamon State?

A. In probably the fall of 1977 is when I started.

Q. Ok.

A. So it was still a youngster at that time.

Q. Oh, yeah. Where were your classes located?

A. Our classes were located, I'm trying to remember the exact location, but they were the plywood buildings basically that were there. I think... I think it was like Building A. They were all under letters, and I think we were in Building A. And that's where most of my classes actually took place. There was a few in some of the other areas but that was the primary building that I remember.

Q. So most of the business courses were in the same building?

A. Same area, yeah. I think there was a... if I remember right, there was like two or three buildings in that area. And you took a... I took some computer science courses and I took some accounting and then the business, the tax, and that type of courses I took.

Q. Uh-huh. So were there buildings being built while you were there?

A. Yeah, Brookens was being built while I was there. It actually got started if I remember right I forget what year Brookens started. I don't know if you can recall that, but I still remember when it was being finished and it was just a massive building, you know, when you consider all the plywood buildings there.

Q. So that was the first building?

A. That was the first one I remember because it was just so big and it was beautiful.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. You know you just kept thinking this school's going to be something or they wouldn't spend this kind of money out here. But the other thing you know I remember is just the soccer team you know. Gonulsen I think was the...

Q. Aydin Gonulsen.

A. Gonulsen was the coach and it was... they were a big deal because in... It's amazing here in St. Louis, soccer has always been a big, soccer was always a big thing. And for some reason in Springfield back then you know soccer was just like... When he came, we didn't realize how big soccer was, and they had such a great team. For such a small school, their team was tremendous. And then you started seeing Springfield pick up soccer. And that... then on your Saturdays, you'd go out to SSU, which is what I called it (laughter) and it would just be full of kids.

Q. That's right.

A. It still is I'm sure because it has got the field of choice.

Q. That's great. So what was your first impression or can you remember your faculty members?

A. I remember most of them. Definitely Don Stanhope; he was my main guy. And there's several teachers I remember as just being really, really good. Bob Maurath was another one, he taught me tax.

Q. Morath?

A. I think Bob Maurath was M-A-U-R-A-T-H, I think.

Q. Ok.

A. And then Gene (John) Nosari, and is Gene... he may... is he still here?

Q. He retired.

A. Ok I was going to say, but Gene Nosari was there. And then there were several others, but those were the main ones that I had contact with. And I always respected Don; his whole purpose was to get you through your degree and have you qualify to take the CPA exam. I mean that was his whole thought in life. You know, Larry, we've got to get you through these classes and here's what you've got to learn as you go through. But it was like when you graduated, his impression that you wouldn't graduate with an accounting degree. You were

going to go on and take that CPA exam and pass it. And I was always impressed with the by Don.

Q. Was he your advisor?

A. Yeah, he was actually, yeah my accounting advisor at the time.

Q. Beside your memorable professors, do remember people you went to school with?

A. There's a few. But going to night class, it's a lot tougher. It's amazing that my current brother-in-law was actually in a class with me. And until you know we got to really know each other, he was like... I know we've met before. And then we started talking and the more you talk, you're like, oh yeah, cost accounting out at Sangamon State University, that's where we know each other from.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. So you know, I remember Dave real well, but I think to...

Q. What was his name?

A. Dave Marlett. David Marlett.

Q. Did he receive a degree?

A. Yeah, he actually had to finish up some accounting courses... he went, he's an ISU grad but he had to finish up some accounting courses so he could sit for the CPA exam.

Q. Oh, ok.

A. And so he took the courses out there to finish. And Merrick David is a CPA there in Springfield, Illinois.

Q. Marlette?

A. Just L-E-T-T.

Q. Ok great. In accounting you don't probably do group projects or you didn't do group projects? It was more like one on one.

A. It was more one on one. You had a few group projects in some of the other courses I took like some of the computer science. And then in one of the business courses I do remember we had a simulation of where you would invest money you know and it was kind of an investments

course or a finance course; invest money and see who made the most money from that type of situation.

The other thing that I really remember and you know I have to admit I don't know if UIS has it today, but it was a study... work study that you did and you got credit for work study. And I got quite a bit out of that, where you actually... I used my current job that I was in with CIPS but you had to change something, you had to do a process to make it better. And you met with an advisor, and I'm getting older I can't remember my advisor's name for that.

Q. Ok.

A. But I found that very valuable. It was a really valuable experience for me.

Q. That sounds good. Do you remember how people dressed? Were people coming from work?

A. You know a lot of people...

Q. Was it a formal setting or real casual?

A. It was still very casual. I think most people... I think the classes usually started around 6 or 6:30, gave us plenty of time usually to get home. And quite honestly with CIPS at the time, they would let me leave a little early if they knew I had class. And I could go in and switch into a few more comfortable clothes. Once in a while, I mean it was not abnormal to see an individual show up in a suit or a dress or something of that nature if they coming from work. So I mean you did see that a lot.

Q. Were your faculty very casual in their appearance, do you remember?

A. You know, some were but I can always remember if I remember right, Bob Maurath always wore a tie.

Q. Ok.

A. He always wore a tie, but others were a little more casual with the dress.

Q. Were you aware of the image of Sangamon State in the community being kind of a very far out there place?

A. Yeah, you know you heard it from time to time from different folks. I probably didn't see it as much.

Q. That's what I wondered. In business, you may not...

A. In business, I didn't. In the accounting world, I didn't see it as much. But you heard so much about the... the public involvement or the public side of the studies, how they were a little more out there on the far wing than other people.

Q. But from your perspective in the courses you went to, do you feel it would be the same as if you had gone to ISU?

A. Oh yes, yeah. As a matter of fact, back then I felt I had a little more one on one than if I would have went to a large university. I felt that...

Q. What were the size of your classes, do you remember?

A. There was nothing over 25 that I can remember. I think most of my classes were around 20 people.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. Plus the instructors were very open to you meeting with them whenever you needed. If you were having trouble, which I'm sure it is that way today, but I just felt like they would meet with me any time. And if it wasn't before or after class if I needed to arrange a time with them, I could get a time. And if I ever I had a problem of any type, I could talk to Don Stanhope or whomever and I could find something.

Q. Describe what computers were like when you... you mentioned computer classes.

A. Yeah, computers... you didn't know what they were like because you didn't have one on your desk. They were the type of... it was the type of system where you had punch cards and you actually went to a punch card machine and you typed out what you wanted the program to do. It was more FORTRAN, they called it.

So PCs were not there and that's what I tell people today, where I... you know when you're working some of these young kids I call them out here, most of those kids don't realize the kind of education you had. And that we had punch cards and we would turn the punch cards into the computer room, they'd run the punch cards, and you'd get your spit out, you know your print out the next morning. So to actually know what the computer was back then, you didn't know what the computer was.

Q. Did Sangamon State have computer labs or they had a system on the campus?

A. They had the programs there. And I think if I remember right, you could get the punched card reader and that, but that was at the very end of whenever I was graduating.

Q. Right. I just wondered how the university compared with your place of work in terms of computer facilities.

A. Actually I mean they were very similar because when I was at CIPS I was in a position where I worked with computers a little bit and I did the same thing. I worked with punch cards and that type of thing and you didn't really have... I mean today when kids just grab their, you know their computers... well both of my children went to schools where everything is switched over now. As a freshman you buy a computer, a PC and you take it with you and actually most of the books are online.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And my son who is at, a sophomore at Mizzou [University of Missouri-Columbia] now, most of his classes he turns his homework in online.

Q. Sure.

A. And so there's... the teachers in a way it's sometimes even more difficult because the teacher's know exactly when you turned it, has the date stamp and everything (laughter). You can't say, "Oh, I turned it in."

Q. That's right.

A. But yeah, the computers when you think of where we were then and where we are now is just unbelievable, the pace we're moving. And it's a good pace, it's good.

Q. Did you have to take classes outside the school of business, like... they called them intersessions or not intersessions, these kind of classes that would be multidisciplinary kind of requirement for graduation?

A. I didn't have to take too many of those that I can recall.

Q. Ok.

A. The work study was one that you took and that didn't really have to do with your business degree. I mean it did but at the same time it was a little bit, I think we even did some psychology type courses and that.

Q. That's what I wondered.

A. But I didn't have to take a lot. I got a lot of my electives out of the way. As a matter of fact when I decided I was going to go to Sangamon State, I actually went and talked to Sangamon State about what courses do I have to take in order to get in here and what do I want to get done. And that's when they instructed me you know, you get all the electives out of the way so you can concentrate on your core classes.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. So when I started as what you would consider a junior at Sangamon State University, I took a battery of accounting courses. I mean it was just a lot of accounting right up front and math and those type, taxes and income taxes and those type of things.

Q. Uh-huh, ok. Did you ever stop after class with friends at one of the local watering holes?

A. The local watering hole that we would stop at I think was called Crows Mill School. And we would stop there periodically, yeah, that was... that was always a lot of fun and it did get you an opportunity to know some of the students. That was one way you maybe got to know some of the students.

Q. Were faculty there, too?

A. I never did see faculty, I never did meet with faculty there, but I'm sure that happened (laughter).

Q. Yeah. Have you stayed in touch with any faculty or students?

A. Not too much, I really haven't. Like I said, once I was at the school, once I got my degree, I was married and involved with kids and that tends to take you away from that. It's amazing how you do once in a while especially in Springfield you always ran into someone from Sangamon State.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. You ran into people that you even knew in classes. But really after moving to St. Louis, we did have a couple of get togethers down here where I ran into a few people. But I haven't really kept up with anyone since then.

Q. Ok. Would you say... how did you get involved with the campus alumni board and alumni relations?

A. Actually Chuck gave me a call to see if I would be interested and I looked at it as an opportunity to give back to the school in any way that I could, plus maybe even keep in contact with the school. I think one of things that I really think is great about University of Illinois Springfield today is that we have on campus housing and we have a student atmosphere. I've always told my kids when they go to school, you're going to go away for four years and you're going to stay on campus because I missed that.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And even today my daughter is looking at going to St. Louis University and if she goes there even though we live in St. Louis, she will stay in the dorm so she can have that dorm experience. So I think it's incredible... I love to drive out to Sangamon State... Sangamon State... University of Illinois Springfield today because it's changed so much and it's just a remarkable place now. And I see you know a lot of the pictures on the website and in the books, it looks like you know there's a real student atmosphere there now.

And what's nice is I think they've meshed well with the night schools. People that can still go to night school there and get their degree, and you still have the day time activities that are going on. And if anything maybe for the current students it's nice that they have the availability of going at night if they want to, so it's really good.

Q. So tell me about when you graduated. Did you do the graduation ceremony, cap and gown?

A. I did not, and again it's part of why when I went to night school, I did not do the walk. And you know I regret that. I wished I would have, I really wished I would have. But at that time I didn't.

Q. Ok. So how long... when did you sit for the CPA?

A. It took me a little while to get into it, but I actually got my CPA in 1987.

Q. Ok.

A. So I passed the exam in 1987.

Q. So did you have refresher courses?

A. Yeah, I actually... I took Person/Wolinsky out at Sangamon... UIS.

Q. Yep, yep.

A. And I took that refresher course and I actually ended up taking another one at ISU prior to that one. But I really enjoyed the Person/Wolinsky one.

Q. Ok. And were those taught by our accountancy faculty?

A. The Person/Wolinsky was, yes. Yeah they had... it's done a lot if anyone's into accounting, there's a course called Beckett or Becker out there. And it's done a lot on the same way. You have some tapes that you listen to but there's always a professor there to talk about what you're listening to and some of the questions that are being asked.

Q. Were there some of the same faculty or different ones when you were back?

A. You're stretching my memory (laughter).

Q. Leonard Branson, was he part of that at that time?

A. You know the name sounds familiar, but I could not tell you that for sure.

Q. Been there for a long time.

A. Yeah, for me that's 22 years (laughter).

Q. I understand. So did you feel that you got the value from your education that you had anticipated?

A. Most definitely, I think I got the value and more. Matter of fact I would have... my daughter at one time was thinking about going into accounting. And I would have recommended she go to UIS because it's a smaller school, and it's a school that has the student housing now so she could live there and enjoy the campus. She has decided to go into occupational therapy, which requires a master's degree program so you have to look for a school that has that.

Q. Right.

A. But I look at the education I got first of all and I don't think the education could be beat in any school. I really don't because as we get older we all know and you try to explain it to your kids, an education is what you put into it. I don't care if you go to Harvard, Notre Dame, and step it on down and you get to little UIS, it's all in what you put into it. And if you put into your education a serious effort, you're going to get a lot out of it.

Bit I do think it helped being a little bit smaller school and having some of the teachers that I had. I think they drove me; it's kind of like today... I'm sure Springfield is the same way, but in St. Louis when you go to high school, you're not even given the opportunity of, "Are you going to go to college?" You are pushed from freshman year on, "What college are you going to? What are you going to major in?" I kind of felt that at Sangamon State at the time that Stanhope wasn't giving me a choice of getting a CPA. That was where I was going and some...

Q. Now that you're in performance measurement, you understand you need to have some of that data.

A. That's right, that's right.

Q. You didn't want dropouts.

A. That's right. And you know it's amazing because I've done everything from true accounting work to what I... and I've actually done some HR work and up until now and now I'm doing

performance management, which isn't truly I guess accounting work, but you're still working a lot with numbers and your math and finance background pays off.

And I do a lot with... the other part of my job is business risk management, so I look at business risk management a lot. But it's all a basis of what you've got behind you. And you know I think my degree stacks up with about anyone around here. From a pay perspective, I don't think I could do any better than where I am. I think I was very lucky of getting involved in a public utility to start with and staying them.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And I'm sure there are occupations and areas you can go into to make more money, but it's been a very good ride for me and a very... it's a secure job and very good pay so I'm more than happy with my education that I got.

Q. Great. Well, thank you very much. Are there any other things that you wanted to say that you don't... that you didn't touch on?

A. I guess the only thing I would say is that I hope to stay involved now that I've gotten involved through the alumni board. As a matter of fact, I've even got it on my calendar May 11th, UIS because... so I and for me I'll probably take maybe a half day vacation or something to go back to the meeting because I do want to go to some of the meetings. And with me, I've got... being here 32 years, I've got six weeks vacation, so I can take some time and go back, and we've still got relatives that live back there.

But I want to stay more involved with UIS, and I know just from being on the Alumni Board it's a struggle today. And they are doing everything they can with the money they have so it's a different world that we live in. But back then... I actually used the school for not only my education for my degree but even when I was studying for the exam, I knew... a friend of mine was going to get her master's out there and I regret never getting my masters but that's bygone days. But when I was studying for the CPA, I would go to Brookens Library and I'd sit there for three hours and study while she went to class, so it... there is a lot of good memories there.

Q. That's great. Well thank you so much, Larry.

A. You're quite welcome.

27 minutes 27 seconds

End of Interview